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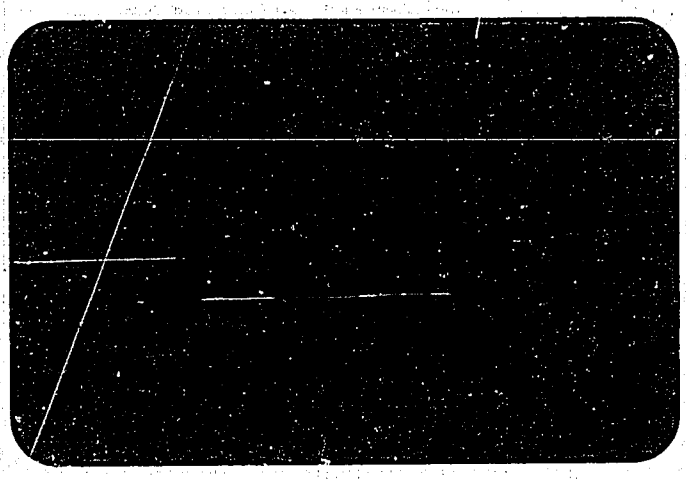
ABSTRACT

The 12 extensively annotated articles and documents included in this collection range from analyses of what is wrong with alternative schools to procedures for their development. (IRT)



Number 21 October 1976

*The Best of ERIC* presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give the practicing educator easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

Materials were selected for inclusion from the ERIC catalogs *Resources in Education (RIE)* and *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE).*

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# Alternative Schools



Abramson, Paul. "Alternative Schools: They're the Rage, and a Reasonable One. How One Public School District Offers a Variety of Alternative Programs." *The American School Board Journal*, 162, 10 (October 1975), pp. 38-40. EJ 124 204.

"If education is to be 'centered' on something, it must be centered on the child, not the method." According to Abramson, the way to accomplish truly child-centered education is through educational alternatives, which offer a variety of learning environments appropriate to the variety of ways in which different children learn. Educational alternatives give educators the opportunity "to match child, material, and methodology on an individualized basis."

Abramson condemns those educators who use the alternative education label as an excuse for failing to teach the educational basics—"knowing how to read, write, and do arithmetic." He believes the ultimate goal of any kind of educational method or form, especially on the elementary school level, is teaching these basics. As he states, "Any teacher who says the basics are not important—that he or she teaches more important things—is using the phrase 'alternative education' as a cop-out."

To achieve the educational goal that he endorses, Abramson asserts that "every educational program must have objectives," as well as "a prescribed way of measuring the success of the program in terms of reaching those objectives." But the objectives and their measures "need not be the same" for all programs.

Abramson's arguments for alternative education are educational, not sociological and psychological like Smith, Burke, and Barr's nor political like Jones's.

Allen, Harvey A. "Alternative Routes to Adulthood: A Bibliography." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, 9 (May 1975), pp. 632-635. EJ number not yet assigned.

Allen's bibliography covers the major areas of concern in alternative education. His sources are divided into four sections: those dealing with the philosophical and sociological roots of alternative education; those dealing with reform within the public school system; those dealing with learning outside the classroom setting (including career education and community education); and those dealing with the free school movement separate from the public school system. Each entry is briefly annotated.

Barr, Robert D. *The Growth of Alternative Public Schools: The 1975 ICOPE Report.* Bloomington, Indiana: International Consortium for Options in Public Education, 1975. 17 pages. ED 106 898.

According to this survey, the number of alternative schools has grown dramatically from approximately 25 before 1969 to in excess of 1,250. Barr points out that no educational innovation in the past has achieved such drastic expansion in such a short time. The survey shows a decrease in the number of open schools and schools-without-walls, but an increase in the number of learning centers and continuation schools. Barr states that his data does not indicate a major trend toward fundamentalist, "back-to-basics" schools.

He attributes the rise in the total number of alternative schools to eight factors, including increased attention to education alternatives by education publications, as well as by general periodicals, such as *Time* and *Newsweek;* the formulation of accreditation procedures; the endorsement of alternative schools by state departments of education and by federal and private funding organizations; and the development of teacher education programs geared to alternative school teaching.

Public opinion toward alternative schools has also changed in the past few years. Increasingly, citizens seem to regard education alternatives as valid uses for scarce tax dollars, Barr believes.

Although its statistics are not comprehensive, as Barr acknowledges, this survey does point out a rather amazing growth.

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Barth, Roland S. "Is There a Way Out?" *National Elementary Principal*, 53, 3 (March/April 1974), pp. 12-18. EJ 096 020.

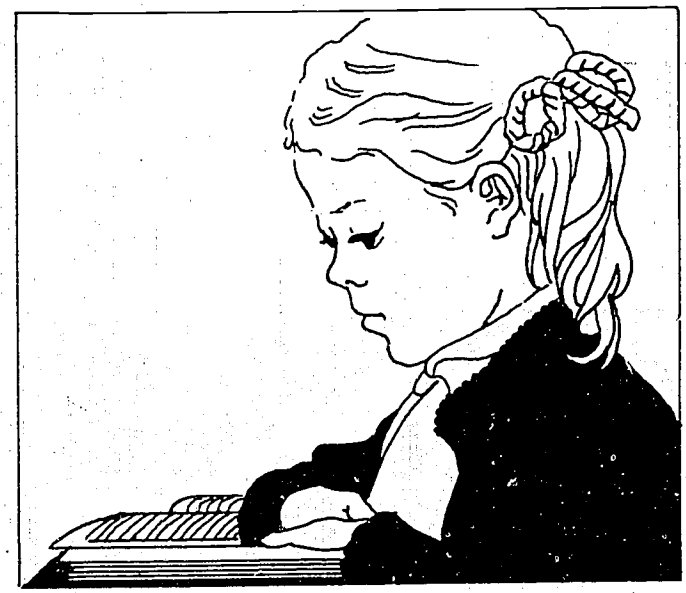
Barth notes the gradual dissolution of uniformity in the schools, pointing out that no longer can the principal rely on

his teachers, students, or their parents to condone a "uniform position for everyone" in the school. The erosion of uniformity has led to an accompanying erosion of the power of the principal to administer the school. Barth recommends that the principal utilize "diversity" and "ecumenism" to reduce dissonance and to encourage learning.

Such diversity can be accomplished by offering education alternatives on two levels—within the district as a whole, and within a particular school. Barth prefers the latter approach, noting that when alternative schools are set up within the district, students, teachers, and parents with similar attitudes and values tend to congregate in individual schools, defeating the goal of teaching people "to understand and live with one another."

Providing alternative education within a school necessitates giving individual teachers autonomy within their classrooms, allowing them to choose the means by which they accomplish the educational goals set out by the school as a whole. It is essential to place students in the classroom environment most suited to aiding their development, according to Barth.

Barth's article is of interest because he approaches the implementation of alternative education on a local level. As an elementary school principal, Barth indicates a thorough acquaintance with the problems of resolving conflicting expectations and still maintaining educational quality.



Broudy, Harry S. "Educational Alternatives—Why Not? Why NOT." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 54. 7 (March 1973), pp. 438-440. EJ 073 824.

Broudy analyzes four arguments commonly employed by advocates of education alternatives—that such alternatives promote freedom, that they encourage better choice, that they "provide for differences," and that they promote creativity.

Alternative schools are good, according to Broudy, if they increase the freedom of the student to achieve three kinds of "adequacy": occupational adequacy, civic adequacy, and personal adequacy. In other words, if alternative schools make it possible for students to adapt to society, then they are successful. However, "if they simply free the pupil" from the task of achieving social adaptation, then "they are not good."

Broudy contends that frequently alternative school advocates fail to acknowledge the basis on which wise decision-making is founded. He states that "many of the pressures for alternatives can be construed as a flight from responsibility."

The accommodation of differences and the encouragement of individual creativity supposedly accomplished by education alternatives can be accomplished just as well within the traditional public school, according to Broudy. He notes that "alternatives as such do not of themselves guarantee the satisfaction of the demands of individuality."

Deal, Terrence E. *An Organizational Explanation of the Failure of Alternative Schools, Research and Development Memorandum No. 133*, Stanford, California: Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, Stanford University, 1975. 27 pages. ED 101 441.

Deal maintains that the failure of some alternative schools is attributable to intraorganizational difficulties—that "they were not able to cope with the organizational problems produced by new authority patterns and by highly complex educational processes." Deal's thesis departs from the more common economic, political, and anthropological explanations of alternative school failure. He speculates that problems arising from these three factors may follow from the basic organizational weakness of the schools, instead of serving as sources for that weakness.

Deal's organizational analysis uncovered "a fairly predictable series of events or stages" leading to one of three "outcomes": dissolution of the school, assumption of the characteristics of traditional schools, or development of a "stabilized alternative to conventional schooling." His two case studies (of a community school and an urban school) indicate three main evolutionary phases through which alternative schools pass.

First, "the euphoric stage" is marked by excitement, enthusiasm, and cooperation among students, staff, and parents. Second, the psychic upheaval stage occurs, characterized by depression and crises. After upheaval, dissatisfaction sets in. Everyone involved comes to believe that the alternative school "is no better than anything else." The dissatisfaction is resolved in one of the three outcomes listed above.

This anatomy of organizational problems is well written and an intelligent, constructive approach to a topic that alternative educational proponents sometimes don't like to confront—the failure of alternative schools.

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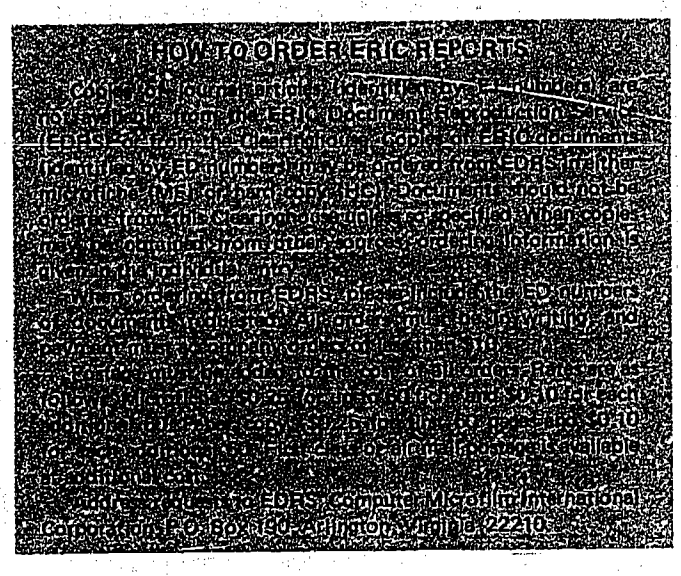
DeTurk, Philip, and Mackin, Robert. *Alternative School Development: A Guide for Practitioners*. Durham, New Hampshire: New England Program in Teacher Education, 1974. 11 pages. ED 110 458.

According to these two "initiators and former directors of public alternative schools," the development of an alternative school "should not be an emotional anti-school 'happening'." Instead, it must be a well-planned, structured undertaking. Structure not only provides "stability," but it also encourages the development of an effective evaluation and communications system.

DeTurk and Mackin outline five "action stages of alternative school development": exploration (initial investigation of the appropriateness of an alternative school); commitment




(from the school board, including funding); definition of the characteristics, objectives, and resources of the school; school construction (putting plans into operation); and refinement ("continued self-reflection").

These developmental stages are closely related to the concerns and issues that arise in operating an alternative school. Goals and objectives must be stated specifically to serve as a basis for ongoing evaluation by decision-makers. "Internal concerns" are those relating to "curriculum, people, and structure." "External concerns" are those involving the school's relationship with the public.

These authors point out that many times alternative schools lose necessary support "by building a shell of fuzzy rhetoric, defensive public action, and belligerent internal interaction." Careful structuring helps to prevent these difficulties.

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Dunn, Rita, and Dunn, Kenneth. "Learning Style as a Criterion for Placement in Alternative Programs." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, 4 (December 1974), pp. 275-278. EJ 107 321.

Assignment of students to alternative education programs should not be done on "a wholesale, random, voluntary, or parent-determined basis," according to these authors. Unless the learning situation fits the individual student's learning style, little will be accomplished by switching school environments.

The Dunns outline four "sets of stimuli" that affect the individual's style of learning. Different students react differently to these sets of stimuli. First, environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, noise, and building design elicit different responses. Second, the emotional makeup of the child determines which learning situation will be optimal. Third, sociological factors, such as how the student reacts to his peers and to authority figures, affect learning style. And finally, the student's particular physical makeup affects how he learns. For example, some students are more receptive to visual stimuli, whereas others respond better to aural or tactile stimuli.

The authors outline the necessary learning style characteristics for several kinds of instructional programs (the open classroom, the individualized classroom, and the traditional classroom).

Although their prose is somewhat jargon-ridden, their basic argument is well made. Freedom of choice is important, but cannot be allowed to become the decisive factor in selecting an education alternative.

Fantini, Mario D. "Education By Choice." *NASSP Bulletin*, 57, 374 (September 1973), pp. 10-19. EJ 083 861.

Pointing out that "alternative public education means diversifying the means to common ends," Fantini outlines six "ground rules that legitimize alternatives." First, the alternatives must be based on a common set of objectives. Second, alternative schools must not be exclusive, since "no educational option can be considered legitimate if it practices exclusivity in any form."

Third, all alternatives must be created and treated equally in order to avoid bad feeling among participants. Fourth, teachers, parents, and students must be allowed freedom of choice in selecting an alternative. Fifth, each alternative program must be carefully evaluated. And finally, "alternative education should not depend on increases in per student expenditure." It should hold its own, financially.

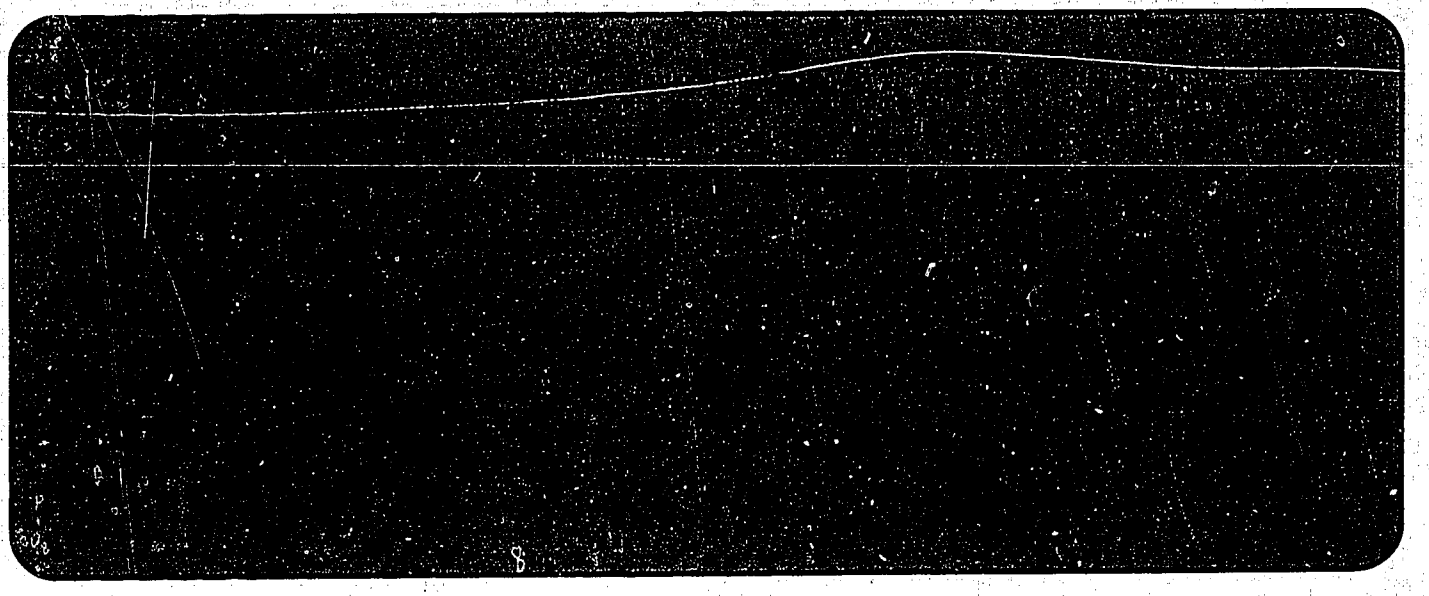
Fantini includes a brief description of the Quincy, Illinois, Education by Choice plan that offers five education alternatives within the same public high school. Fantini, who is one of the foremost proponents of alternative schools, paints a very appealing picture of education by choice through alternative programs.

Jones, Philip G. "How to Pick the Right Kind (or Kinds) of Alternative School for Your Community." *The American School Board Journal*, 163, 1 (January 1976), pp. 31-34. EJ 130 922.

"Happy parents and students are those who have been provided choices—lots of choices," according to Jones. Just as an "ostensibly" wide variety of automobile styles and accessories makes consumers happy, so does a wide variety of educational alternatives make the public happy, he argues. Therefore, school boards should not hesitate to respond positively to the public's demand for more than one kind of schooling. A school board should first commit itself to providing good basic education in all schools, "regardless of their environmental and methodological differences." Then it can evolve a policy allowing for educational alternatives.

Jones lists six steps that school boards should take to ensure a coordinated, effective alternative education program. First, administrators and board members should learn about alternative school programs in other districts. Jones provides names and addresses of school personnel in districts around the country who have been involved in setting up and running alternative schools.

The board should adopt "a comprehensive written policy on alternatives or options in public education." This policy statement should include the district's basic educational goals for all schools, as well as its position on parent and student involvement in decision-making and its enrollment policy. The board should survey both parents and community members, as well as school staff, to determine what kinds of alternatives these groups prefer. A cost estimate is essential, though Jones points out that setting up alternative programs is frequently not expensive. The district must define admission procedures for alternative schools. And finally, it must determine whether these schools are to be located within existing schools or separate from them.



Some readers might find Jones' comparison between schools and cars somewhat glib. He rather cynically implies that the *illusion* of variety is the important thing and that, in actuality, neither cars nor alternative schools offer much real choice.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. *Policies and Standards for the Approval of Optional Schools and Special Function Schools, 1974-75.* Chicago: 1974. 28 pages. ED 101 476.

The emergence of alternative schools ("optional" or "special function schools") has led to the need for some kind of quality control to ascertain whether these schools provide the educational services they were intended to provide. This quality control can be achieved by accreditation, according to this booklet compiled by the North Central Association. The NCA has served as the accrediting agency for conventional schools in its region for many years. In order to achieve the goal of upgrading education, the NCA's "standards have been set high." The policies and standards for alternative schools are intended to be equally high, though the NCA recognizes that these schools frequently differ in purpose and composition.

The accreditation standards for alternative schools described in this booklet are "qualitative in nature." A "framework of common preconditions for quality education" provides the basis for standards and procedures particular to each alternative school's purposes and goals. For example, the NCA requires that the organizational structure of an optional school facilitate the achievement of the school's stated purposes. In other words, it must be administered effectively. But the NCA does not specify what form those organizational structures need take, as long as "the administration of the school has the necessary authority and autonomy."

Once the NCA has accepted an alternative school's set of standards, it examines the school every three years to determine whether it is still maintaining high quality education. If the school falls down, it loses its accreditation.

The NCA's approach to accreditation for alternative schools helps to answer the question of how to ensure high quality education in schools that differ greatly from each other, as well as from conventional schools.

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Smith, Vernon H.; Burke, Daniel J.; and Barr, Robert D. "A Description of Optional Alternative Public Schools." *Notre Dame Journal of Education*, 6, 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 362-367. EJ 131 599.

For the authors of this article, choice is the most important element in alternative education and the most important contribution it can make to the community. The psychological and sociological effects of choice are quite beneficial, according to Smith, Burke, and Barr.

Because families select their own school out of several alternatives, they are more "loyal" to it and more committed to education. Likewise, according to Smith, Burke, and Barr, teachers who choose the kind of school in which they wish to teach are more loyal and are certainly more happy with students who are in school by choice, not by compulsion.

Not only is "choice in public education consistent with democratic principles," but alternative education also "provides opportunities for decision making and community participation at the local level." Choice affords a kind of control of the market by education consumers. Alternative schools must be more responsive to community needs, since they are dependent on voluntary enrollments. As these authors state, "This open market creates a healthy feedback from the consumer to the professional educator."

Smith, Burke, and Barr maintain that "special function schools" with assigned students "should not be considered alternative schools." Some educators would disagree with this distinction.

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